



## Chapter 40



Lying draped over Amen's chest, I traced idle patterns against his bare bronze skin, my fingers dancing over the steady rise and fall of his breath. The cool night air drifted through the open window, stirring the sheer curtains, but his warmth enveloped me, keeping me tethered to this moment.

His fingers moved absently through my hair, brushing it back from my damp skin, while his other arm rested across his stomach, loose and relaxed.

For the first time in what felt like an eternity, there was no urgency, no unspoken tension crackling between us.

Only the quiet hum of our mingled breaths, the remnants of pleasure still thrumming through my limbs, and the slow, intimate murmur of conversation.

"You're quiet," Amen finally said, his voice low, almost hesitant.

I tilted my head, looking up at him from where I lay sprawled across his chest. His expression was unreadable, but his dark brown eyes roamed over my face, studying, searching.

"Just thinking," I admitted.

"That much is clear." His lips curved in amusement. "Should I be concerned?"

I sighed, shifting slightly, my body pressing deeper into his.

"I've just been wondering..." My fingers drifted lower, ghosting over the ridges of his abdomen. "You said you've never felt energy like mine before. Not in any of the rituals. Not in any of the concubines."

His gaze darkened slightly, his fingers stalling in my hair. "I

haven't."

I swallowed, gathering my thoughts before I spoke.

"What if—" I hesitated. "What if that means something? What if my energy... my blood... could serve as something stronger? A conduit that stabilizes you in a way the rituals never could?" I turned my face into his chest, my voice dropping to a whisper. "What if my blood is the answer?"

His body tensed beneath me. "No." His rejection was immediate, his voice firm. "I will not spill your blood for my sake."

I lifted my head, frowning. "But—"

"No, Neferet." He cupped the back of my neck, forcing me to meet his gaze. "I don't care what theories you have, or what magic you think may exist in your veins. I will not harm you."

His conviction was unshakable, his golden eyes fierce, but I knew him too well now. Beneath that resolve lay something else—fear.

Fear of what he might do. Fear of losing control. Fear of me suffering for his sake. I sighed, giving in for now, but I knew this conversation wasn't over.

Instead of arguing, I nestled closer, pressing my lips to the sharp edge of his collarbone.

"You're protective," I murmured against his skin. "It's endearing."

He huffed out a soft laugh, his hold on me tightening. "It's necessary."

I let the moment settle, allowing myself to simply exist in his embrace, listening to the steady rhythm of his heart. But my mind wouldn't rest.

I thought of my dreams—the blood-red Nile, the voice that called to me from the darkness. The Temple of Isis standing beneath the full moon.

I had told no one. Not even Werel. But now, wrapped in Amen's arms, it felt right.

"I need to tell you something," I whispered.

His fingers stilled against my skin. "Go on."

I took a slow breath. "I've been having dreams. Strange dreams. They started after the night on the balcony—when my nose bled and my head struck with another vision."

His silence urged me to continue.

"I don't remember all of them," I admitted. "But certain things... they linger. The Nile, red as blood. The Temple of Isis, standing beneath the moonlight. And a voice." I shivered slightly. "A voice I can never quite place. It tells me things—things I don't always understand. But I think... I think it's trying to guide me."

Amen's hand traced soothing circles against my spine, but I felt the tension in him, the way his breath deepened.

"And you believe it is the goddess Isis speaking to you?" His voice was quiet, thoughtful.

"I don't know." I frowned, tilting my head to look up at him. "But whoever it is, they want me to act. They want me to be

ready. For what, I don't know."

His fingers brushed a loose strand of hair from my face. "You should have told me sooner."

I exhaled. "I wasn't sure if it mattered."

"It matters," he said firmly.

We fell into a thoughtful silence. I could see the way he was processing my words, the gears turning in his mind. His protectiveness flared again, but beneath it, I sensed curiosity. Perhaps even a touch of unease.

My mind drifts to the past—to the first night we shared in the bathhouse, to the way his lips claimed mine in the water, to the heat that crackled between us like a divine spark.

I had felt no weakness then. No exhaustion. No drain upon my body. Yet now, every touch, every kiss from him carries a weight—his power leeching at my very essence.

Curious, I tilt my head, watching the steady rise and fall of his chest beneath my fingertips.

"How long do the effects of a ritual last?" I murmur, tracing slow circles against his skin.

His fingers, tangled in my hair, still for a moment before he exhales.

"Not so long," he admits. "Before our first night in the bathhouse, I had already undergone another ritual."

I stiffen slightly. "With whom?" I ask, though I suspect I already know the answer.

His lips twitch in mild amusement, as if he can sense the flicker of something possessive in my voice. "Meritaten."

Of course.

I breathe in slowly, keeping my expression neutral, but my thoughts stir.

That night in the baths—he had been fully in control, undiminished by his curse. And now, I finally understand why.

I lift my gaze to his, the wheels in my mind turning. "Because she bears the blessing of Nephthys," I say, more a statement than a question.

A flicker of surprise passes through his golden eyes. Then, he huffs a quiet laugh, shaking his head.

"I should have known you would put the pieces together."

I smirk, though my heart is still uneasy. "Nephthys and Osiris were bound together, were they not? Their energies must hold a natural resonance."

"They do," he confirms. "Which is why she can sustain me longer than the others." His fingers glide over my back absentmindedly, but I do not miss the slight weariness in his voice. "Even so, it takes its toll on her."

A sharp pang of something unexpected stirs in my chest—jealousy.

But I push it down, reminding myself that Meritaten's affections for him are one-sided. Still, I cannot shake the thought that, even through suffering, she shares something with him that I do not.

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And then, almost as if to distract himself, he said, "You're far too reckless."

I smiled. "I thought you liked that about me."

He sighed, a mock display of long-suffering patience. "I do." He traced a slow line down my spine, making me shiver. "That's the problem."

I watched him carefully, my fingers brushing over his lips before traveling lower, trailing along the ridges of his ribs. "You still haven't told me when our first ritual is supposed to be."

Amen exhaled slowly, his eyes darkening. "The priests are still calculating the most auspicious date," he murmured. "Once it is decided, you will be informed."

A teasing smile played on my lips. "You say that as if I'll be sitting around waiting patiently."

He let out a quiet laugh, shaking his head. "I never expect patience from you."

## **End** *of* *The* **Chapter**

A Chance Meeting



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